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'Post' Sets Up Reagan as Terrorist Target

Washington *Post* Publisher Katherine Graham likes to pretend she's a friend of First Lady Nancy Reagan, who stayed with Graham for several days this summer on Martha's Vineyard. But Graham's "friendship" apparently doesn't mean she cares a hoot about whether her paper is used to trigger the murder of Nancy's husband, the President.

Last week, to the consternation of almost everyone in Washington, except the Washington *Post*, the *Post* carried a front-page story saying that President Reagan had authorized last fall a Central Intelligence Agency covert operation "designed to undermine the Libyan regime headed by Col. Muammar Qaddafi...."

The story went on to note that it was supported by Secretary of State George Shultz, CIA Director William Casey and a narrow majority of both the Senate and House Select Committees on Intelligence, which oversee the CIA.

Written by the *Post*'s Robert Woodward, the article said that the chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee—David Durenberger (R.-Minn.) and Patrick Leahy (D.-Vt.)—had conveyed their opposition to the plan in a letter to the White House, asking how the plan could avoid the government prohibition against assassination.

The White House responded, sources told Woodward, that there was no plan at all to assassinate Qaddafi, and asked the two senators to delete the word "assassination" from their letter. They declined to do so.

Intelligence sources were outraged. Not only were they angry at those who leaked the information, but they were furious at the *Post* for printing it. That story, they insisted, not only blew the covert operation against Libya, a terrorist state backing at least 30 radical insurgencies worldwide, but armed Qaddafi with a pretext to crack down harshly on dissidents at home and murder American officials in Libya or abroad.

"The Washington *Post* appears to relish stories that put the lives of U.S. officials in danger," said one intelligence expert.

What's particularly interesting about this story is that the *Post* is well aware that its article could well prompt Qaddafi to order another plan to kill the President.

Herbert Romerstein, who served as a professional staff member of the House Committee on Intelligence from 1977 until 1983, remarks in a just-published book that the *Post* helped incite Qaddafi to fever pitch in 1981.

On July 25 ~~of that year~~, Romerstein says in a paper included in *Intelligence Requirements for the 1980s*, put out by the Washington-based National Strategy Information Center, the *Post* reported that several members of the House Intelligence Committee had sent a letter to the CIA protesting a certain covert action. Although the *Post* claimed the letter came from both Republicans and Democrats, only the Democrats had signed it. And while the issue was not, in itself, of great signi-

ficance, press speculation about it caused very serious problems.

Newsweek—which is owned by the *Post*—falsely asserted, said Romerstein, that the covert action in question was a "plot to kill Libyan dictator Qaddafi. The so-called Free Officers Association, Qaddafi's supporters in Libya, then threatened to



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murder President Reagan. Thus was born the 'Libyan hit team' threat...."

The *Post*, in short, knew full well that its most recent story could lead to the formation of another Qaddafi hit team. Efforts by HUMAN EVENTS to reach Woodward for an explanation as to why the *Post* ran the story were fruitless, but Woodward has proved in the past that he's very indifferent about jeopardizing the lives of Americans or doing anything that would make it more difficult for states like Libya to engage in international terrorist actions.

In May of this year, the intelligence community was sharply critical of Woodward for his front-page story that left a totally false impression that the CIA was somehow connected with the March 8 car bombing in a Beirut suburb that killed more than 80 Shiite Moslems.

Even the Democratic-dominated House Select Committee on Intelligence dismissed the implications of the *Post* story, while an Administration official contended that the *Post*'s actions "put the lives of every American in Lebanon in jeopardy.... I find it utterly contemptible. It invites retaliation against every American in Beirut, including women and children."

Indeed, one of the hijackers of TWA flight 847 used the news story to justify the murder of Robert Stethem, the Navy diver brutally murdered by his captors.

Woodward and the *Post*, however, appear to have little concern about terrorism and its consequences, the loss of innocent life.

Asked last year at the Jonathan Institute's international conference on terrorism whether the news media would share information with an inter-

national agency to combat terrorism, Woodward replied (according to the June 27 issue of the *Washington Times*):

"It's not our job. Our job, simply and happily, is to find out what's going on and publish it." The audience rumbled in dissent, noted the *Times*, "and even some of the other panel members drew back."

Juliana Pilon, a senior policy analyst with the



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Heritage Foundation, in a paper delivered before an anti-terrorist conference in Washington last week, said she found Woodward's actions despicable.

The concept of press irresponsibility, she stressed, has surely "reached a new low with the publication in the *Washington Post* on Sunday, November 3, of Bob Woodward's story disclosing a 'vulnerability assessment' which allegedly recommended covert U.S. support of foes of Libya's head terrorist Muammar Qaddafi. Retired Navy Admirals Elmo Zumwalt and Worth Bagley charged... that 'Mr. Woodward and the *Post* gave great aid and comfort to the enemy.' 'The enemy' is perhaps a slight misnomer.... Rather, in this case 'the enemy' is an enormously effective, wealthy, terrorist whose hit squads have murdered Libyan critics abroad, who was responsible for the death of a policewoman in London and who, by the *Post*'s own account, 'had formed two new special operations units to conduct commando and terrorist operations, including one naval unit headed by a senior aide. Within the last two weeks there have been intelligence reports that Qaddafi was targeting the U.S. Embassy in Tunis and the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia....'

"Is Woodward's and the *Post*'s decision to publish the leaked information the result of overzealous dedication to truth, to that mythical idol, The Public's Right to Know? I submit that it is rather a repudiation of genuine ethical standards in journalism, a lack of concern for national security, and total disregard for the possibility of inciting terrorist action."

The next time Nancy meets with Katherine on a social basis, says one caustic observer, maybe she should ask Mrs. Graham why her paper is helping to set up her husband as a target for an assassin's bullet.